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Transformational grammar is briefly defined in this paper, and some of the key literature on the subject is indicated. Examples of transformational operation on Spanish sentences are used to demonstrate how this approach makes the teaching-learning process easier and more efficient. (SS)

TRANSFORMATIONAL GRAMMAR IN TEACHING SPANISH

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You may be wondering what is generative, transformational grammar and what does it have to do with language teaching? Transformational, generative grammar is a view of language that attempts to account for the following:

Given a small sample of sentences, man is able to produce or to generate an infinite number of new sentences that he has not heard and yet are acceptable to a speaker of the language. For example, hearing a form like comemos, though other forms of that verb have not been heard, a child can produce, generate a great many forms that are acceptable to the speakers of that language. With yo, he produces yo como, with el, he produces el come, etc. Similarly, from a sentence, El hombre esta aquí, a child is able to produce El hombre alto está aquí, El está aquí, ¿Quién está aquí? and so on. As you can see, this internalized generative grammar is viewed as a system of rules that make it possible to generate all of these structures.

Unlike lower animals man is born with innate capacities that make it possible to operate with this extremely complex machine, this generative grammar which is part of the potential of the human organism. Linguists and psychologists interested in generative, transformational grammar at the moment are trying to determine which language activities can be categorized as being innate and which are learned. When this division is more clear, text book writers and teachers will achieve a greater level of proficiency in their task.

During the past ten years generative, transformational description has attracted much warranted attention. This attention has centered around the publication in 1957 of Noam Chomsky's Syntactic Structures. Since that time other theoretical linguists have become identified with generative, transformational grammar. To name a few: Paul Postal, Robert Stockwell, and Robert Lees. In the area of Spanish we find an influence of generative, transfomrational grammar in the following recent books: The Grammatical Structure of English and Spanish and The Sounds of English and Spanish by Robert STockwell, J.D. Bowen, and John Martin, and Spanish for Teachers: Applied Linguistics by William E. Bull.

A language teacher viewing a theory such as this one, generative, transformational grammar, has at the moment three alternatives:

1. Ignore it
2. Attempt to follow it blindly
3. Abstract from it and put to the test in the classroom some of its principles.

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Let's consider the first alternative, to ignore it. To ignore this theory is to overlook one very important part about learning a second language. In learning a second language we can treat structures in isolation and deal with meaning by means of translation. This leads to inefficiencies and complicated rules. Another solution is to attempt to work out a transformational approach that allows us to go from one simple sentence to a more complex one by the application of simple rules. For example, using transformations we can present two separate statements about the same subject of discourse as follows:

Tengo una criada. "I have a maid."

Cocina bien. "She cooks well."

We can transform these two sentences into one sentence by merely inserting que. Tengo una criada que cocina bien. The resulting meaning has changed very little from the original two sentences, for this is merely an alternate way of saying the same thing. Yet, the source and meaning of the complex sentence is very clear to the student.

Let's go back and re-examine the second alternative, to attempt to follow generative, transformational grammar blindly. Transformational analysis at this point has not achieved a level of understanding that would allow it by itself to support a pedagogical theory. In the area of phonology there is some general agreement on theoretical principles. In the area of syntax, the theory is still in great flux and disagreement, and anything beyond the most elementary seems both tentative and debatable. Although no extensive grammars have been produced by this school, what has been produced poses some very provocative and convincing evidence that transformational analysis may very well reveal to us facts about language that heretofore have been described in vague, imprecise terms. This leads us to the third alternative, to abstract from this theory and put to test in the classroom some of its principles. Let's examine this possibility.

Texts like Modern Spanish, Entender y Hablar, and A-LM treat to a great degree, structures in an unrelated manner. For example, let's examine the definite article and the 3rd person object pronoun. In A-LM they are treated as separate entities requiring separate rules and two separate sets of unrelated pattern drills. Such a procedure does not introduce the student to the system of the language. Few Spanish texts have been constructed where one structure goes explicitly into another structure. For example, some lines might be presented as follows:

Voy a comprar los libros. Now, delete the noun. This gives us Voy a comprarlos. Take the sentence Voy a comprar las plumas. Delete the noun. This gives us Voy a comprarlas. (Notice that rules written in this way make it possible to recapture the derivational history of los and las in a very precise way.) From sentences Voy a comprarlos and Voy a comprarlas we can go directly to Voy a comprarlo and Voy a comprarla by merely deleting an s, giving us the singular form of the pronoun. Notice that rules written in this way make it possible to recapture the derivational history of lo and la in a very precise way. Lo goes back to los and la goes back to las. Los and las are traced to a position before a (+a) noun and (+o) noun. Once we know how to form los and las in the original sentences, we have no

further problem. The fact that we can precisely trace the derivational history of a form makes this a powerful teaching procedure.

Note that going from a complex unit like comprarlos to comprarlo is a familiar transformational device. All we are doing is deleting an s. Such operations aid to reveal the regularity of the Spanish system. There isn't any need to reteach structures as separate, when these structures are essentially the same ones.

I should like to demonstrate, further, by other examples, that you are not entirely unfamiliar with transfomrational procedures, and, besides, that when they are thoroughly systemized, the teaching-learning process can be made easier and more efficient. The Procedure, it is to be remembered, is to begin with a simple statement and show how other sentences can be derived from it by applying simple rules.

Let's begin with Juan compra un libro hoy. This sentence can be transformed into nine different questions. Our current teaching texts, however, do not systematically exploit this tremendous transformational potential, even though, as you will soon see, every transform is known to all of you. You are quite familiar with the transformational procedure which converts the statement into question. The subject changes position and we have ¿Compra Juan un libro hoy? The remaining eight transforms are generated by simple replacement and deletion rules.

1. The subject is a human being and is replaced by quién. The original syntactic pattern of Juan compra un libro hoy is retained.
   ¿Quién compra un libro hoy?

2. The object libro is replaced by que. The un is deleted, and the question work occupies the first slot in the pattern.
   ¿Qué compra Juan hoy?

3. The indefinite articel un is replaced by cuál or qué, which asks for more specification and the noun phrase occupies the first slot.
   ¿Cuál libro compra Juan hoy?

4. The redundant libro is deleted.
   ¿Cuál compra Juan hoy?

5. The indefinite article, as a number morphene, is replaced by an interrogative and libro is pluralized.
   ¿Cuántos libros compra Juan hoy?

6. The redundant libros is deleted.
   ¿Cuántos compra Juan hoy?

7. The adverb hoy is replaced by cuándo which, as in all positions, is transferred to the initial position.
   ¿Cuándo compra Juan un libro?

8. Finally, the verb compra and its object, un libro, can be replaced by the cover term for transitive action, and we have the question
   ¿Qué hace Juan hoy?

It should be noted, now, that the original statement, Juan compra un libro hoy, has six pieces of information about which questions may be asked.

1. Who?
2. What?
3. When?
4. Which?
5. How many?
6. What action?

And it is quite logical to assume that there must be available in the language at least six ways to generate these six transforms from that statement. It is also obvious that when the students learn to generate each transform, they have precisely the same control of this segment of the Spanish system as the native. Moreover, any question containing the same six pieces of information, but with different words, will be transformed in precisely the same way. For example, instead of hoy, we can have mañana, esta mañana, esta tarde, en este momento, etc. In short, the students now have total control of what to do in creating all novel sentences using these structures.

Let's examine another sentence of Compre Vd. un libro. The speaker of this sentence is attempting to influence the behavior of usted. The manner of doing this can be verbalized, for example, by quiere. You add que and the result is Quiere que Vd. compre un libro. The subjunctive is merely the inperative in a new role.

Here are two transforms with which you are all familiar but which texts do not exploit. First, the direct quotation. Dice-Compra el libro! and Dice- Compre el libro! Both are transformed into indirect discourse by inserting que. Dice que compra el libro and Dice que compre el libro.

As demonstrated by the few examples given, transformational grammar can make a powerful contribution to language teaching. It is doubtful that it alone or any one theory will solve all of our teaching problems. Other grammars along with it may have to be used. In producing the best teaching procedures, we will have to be eclectic, and use the best devices proved by their success in the classroom. However, we cannot afford to ignore a new tool, only because it will not by itself do all the possible jobs in teaching Spanish.